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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 004057

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: VP ADVISOR HANNAH, PRESIDENT TALABANI ASSESS THE  
STATE OF IRAQ

Classified By: Political Counselor Margaret Scobey for reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a wide-ranging discussion on October 18, President Jalal Talabani and the Vice-President's National Security Advisor John Hannah discussed the internal political divisions both within the Sunni Arab groups and between the Shia, Sunni Arab, and Kurdish factions within the new Government of Iraq. As expected, security issues were the focus of the discussion, with Talabani suggesting that troops should be stationed in areas recently cleared of terrorist elements to maintain order. Talabani noted that there were also positive stories - for example, the Presidency Council's increasing unity and the potential formation of a more reasonable Sunni Arab religious group - but that Iraq still lacked the support of neighboring Arab countries in bolstering their fragile democracy. END SUMMARY.

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Turmoil Within the Iraqi Cabinet  
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¶2. (C) In a meeting on October 18, President Talabani told the Vice President's National Security Advisor John Hannah that there was some discontent with the cabinet ministers. For example, Minister of Interior Jawad al-Bolani is "a good man surrounded by many difficulties," Talabani claimed. Both the Shia Coalition and other parties are pressuring him to take action in their favor, and all are complaining that he is not responding. Talabani noted, however, that Bolani had inherited a ministry full of internal problems. Bolani was trying to clean up the Iraqi Police (IP), but it is increasingly difficult to find quality recruits for the service, Talabani said.

¶3. (C) Talabani claimed that Sunni Arab Speaker of the Council of Representatives (CoR) Mahmud al-Mashadani is also in trouble. According to Talabani, the Sunni Tawafuq bloc, including even his own party the National Dialogue Council, has come to the decision to remove Mashadani as Speaker and the National Dialogue was prepared to make a public declaration of their intent. (NOTE: There have been several rumors of Mashadani's impending removal from office during the past few months, but the National Dialogue has consistently told the Ambassador that they fully support Mashadani. END NOTE.) Mashadani is not a serious politician, Talabani

complained, and his behavior both within the CoR and in foreign trips was unprofessional and embarrassing.

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Sunni Arabs Needs Internal Unity, Cooperate  
with Others  
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¶4. (C) The debate over Mashadani reflected the overall disunity within the Sunni Arab political community, Talabani said. Warming up to a common theme in recent months, Talabani noted that the Sunni Arabs needed to learn how to cope in a democratic government. For example, their preferred method of demonstrating their disagreement in debates in the CoR was to walk out of the proceedings. In addition, it was difficult to understand what was the "Sunni Arab position" on any key issue, given the ongoing chaos within the main Sunni Arab Tawafuq bloc.

¶5. (C) Aside from the politicians, the Sunni Arab religious community was also making national reconciliation more difficult, Talabani said, citing the leader of the "Sunni naysayers," Harith al-Dari of the Association of Muslim Scholars. However, there might be hope for more cooperation with the Sunni religious community: according to Talabani, two groups are trying to revive the defunct Dara al-Ifta (roughly translated as "House of the Religious Ruling"). The Kurd who had lead

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this organization had recently died, and it was decided to replace him with an advisory group. The first group is led by Sheikh Jamal al-Dabbagh, and the second by Muhsin Abd al-Hamid (who was fired from the Iraqi Islamic Party). The two groups are not united, Talabani lamented, and Talabani himself pledged to find a way to help bring them together. According to Talabani, this group had the potential to be the "Marja'iyah of the Sunni Arabs," and both groups have told him they are committed to fighting sectarianism and terrorism. Talabani stated that he was financially assisting this group, in particular by finding them housing in Baghdad. The Dara al-Ifta is currently based in Tikrit, and is seeking to move to the relative safety of Baghdad.

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Presidency Council Pulling Together  
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¶6. (C) On a more positive note, Talabani stated that the Presidency Council was working very well together. There was full agreement between himself, Shia Vice President Adil Abd al-Mahdi, and Sunni Arab Vice President Tarik al-Hashimi on key issues during the most recent Presidency Council meeting last week: the need to secure Baghdad, end sectarianism and the ensuring violence, etc. Talabani reported that he had tasked Abd al-Mahdi and al-Hashimi to draft two position papers each, one on how to improve Shia-Sunni cooperation, and one on how to secure Baghdad.

¶7. (C) On a related note, Talabani also mentioned his desire to form a "National Front," which would be composed of moderates from the Shia Coalition (specifically, SCIRI),

Tawafuq (Iraqi Islamic Party), and the Kurds. This National Front would form a strong front in the CoR and the Cabinet to work toward ending the sectarian conflict and providing much-needed leadership in Iraq. (NOTE: Talabani has been pushing for the creation of this moderate National Front ever since his preferred candidate for the Prime Ministry, SCIRI's Abd al-Mahdi, lost to Nuri al-Maliki of the Dawa Party. END NOTE.)

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But Security Still a Problem...  
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18. (C) Despite the improving dialogue in the Presidency Council, and the recent agreement within the Policy Committee on National Security (PCNS) by both Shia and Sunni Arab politicians to Prime Minister Maliki's 4-Point security plan, Talabani noted that the overall security situation in Iraq is still dire. Talabani suggested that military forces needed to remain to secure areas that have recently been cleared of terrorist elements, otherwise the terrorists and insurgents would just return after the Coalition Forces have moved on. As for Baghdad's security, Talabani suggested a mixed force of Shia, Sunni Arabs, and Kurds to maintain order in Baghdad. This group would have one uniform, one type of weaponry, one type of vehicle, and one commander - a unified look and a unified purpose - to secure the city. This unit would select from within itself a contingent to clear out different parts of the city - a majority Shia unit to clear Sadr City, for example.

19. (C) According to Talabani, there are two main problems: Terrorists and militias, and a lack of a unified Iraqi identity. The first issue is primarily the problem with the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM). JAM needs to be punished, Talabani stated, and the PCNS had been pressuring Maliki to do something about the Sadrism-affiliated militia. Maliki claimed that he wanted to give the JAM until the end of Ramadan to change their ways, and the PCNS had grudgingly agreed. In addition to the JAM, the

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multitude of private militias - ministry protection units, private bodyguard groups, etc - is contributing to the chaos in Baghdad, Talabani complained. There is no way of maintaining control over so many different organizations, Talabani said, and no centralized method of ensuring quality, training, or accountability for these extra-governmental groups.

110. (C) The second issue is the lack of an "Iraqi identity," Talabani said. Right now, there was no sense of a national community - people defined themselves in terms of their sectarian, ethnic, or tribal identities. Talabani hoped that as sectarian violence declined and the political groups could work more effectively together, the people of Iraq would begin to define for themselves what it meant to be an "Iraqi."

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As Are the Neighbors  
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¶11. (C) Talabani complained that the neighboring Arab countries were doing little to assist Iraq in quelling sectarian divisions. The Saudis, for example, are encouraging the negative attitudes of Sunni Arabs like Harith al-Dari and others who openly speak of killing Americans, he said. Syria continues to support elements of the former Baathist regime, and Iran continues to interfere in the internal affairs of Iraq through training militia elements and providing materials for insurgency activities. Talabani noted that he had seen Syria's foreign minister in New York, and told him that rapprochement should begin by the foreign minister visiting Baghdad and committing Syria to end its support for terrorists attacking Iraq and pledging its support for the new government.

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UNSCR Extension, PKK, and Minority Rights  
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¶12. (C) Talabani also discussed with Hannah several current issues during the meeting:

-- UNSCR Extension: While Talabani understood the need to extend the UNSCR as soon as possible, he noted that Maliki needed to have some control as well. Talabani argued that Maliki should have the authority to move units of his Iraqi Army, and the right to more information-sharing from the Coalition Forces.

-- PKK: Talabani stated flatly that the Government of Iraq had become involved in the PKK issue as a favor to the head of the Turkish National Intelligence Office (TNIO). However, Talabani believed it was a reasonable demand that the Government of Turkey try to work with the legitimate Kurdish political party in Ankara as well as its trilateral efforts. Talabani reminded Hannah that many groups had tried to eliminate the PKK over the past 25 years - including both the Kurdish parties - without success.

-- Minority Rights: Hannah raised the issue of a separate administrative region for Assyrian Christians and other ethnic or religious minorities in Iraq. Talabani stated that, while he did not know much about the subject, he was personally in favor of supporting the special administrative areas or safehavens for minority groups in the Kurdistan region. The situation of the Assyrian Christians in places such as Ninewa, for example, was a separate issue since the Shia and Sunni Arabs were not yet ready to discuss these issues.

KHALILZAD